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CALEDOR
A Tale of the Sundering
GAV THORPE

CALEDOR

A Time of Legends novel

By Gav Thorpe

BOOK THREE OF THE SUNDERING

Ulthuan is burning. Its peoples are scattered, its lands lie in ruin. Under the iron fist of the Witch King dark elves sack and pillage. His desire is nothing short of total domination and the utter extinction of the high elves. Skies blacken with the wings of dragons and smoke occludes the sun. Daemons crawl from their hell-pits, hungry for souls. Through the fires of civil war, a general becomes a king. Prince Caledor takes up the Phoenix Crown and with it the hopes of all Ulthuan. Though it is a burden unwished for, he is the last heroic thread that can unite the realm of the true asur. Darkness closes, filled with the screams of war. Dead elves soak the land in blood, anointing a spell of unbinding, a cataclysm intended to end the very world.

About the Author

Gav Thorpe has been rampaging across the worlds of Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 for many years as both an author and games developer. He hails from the den of scurvy outlaws called Nottingham and makes regular sorties to unleash bloodshed and mayhem. He shares his hideout with Dennis, a psychotic mechanical hamster currently trying to employ Skype as a mind-control network.

Gav's previous novels include fan-favourite *Angels of Darkness* and the epics *Malekith* and *Shadow King*, the first two instalments in the Sundering trilogy, amongst many others.

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AENARION (audio drama)

The following is an excerpt from *Caledor* by Gav Thorpe. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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DURING THE DARKEST years of Ulthuan, the two greatest elves to have lived were at the forefront of the war against the daemons of Chaos. The first Phoenix King, Aenarion the Defender, was aided by Caledor Dragon-tamer, and the two lords of Ulthuan held the daemon hordes at bay for more than a century.

Caledor it was that saw the attacks of the daemons would never cease while the wild winds of magic blew across the world. The Dragontamer studied long and hard the mystical secrets of Chaos, gaining an insight into the immaterial realm beyond any other mortal. Seeing that the magic flowing into the world from the Realm of Chaos in the north sustained the daemons, Caledor set about preparing a mighty spell that would create a vortex of energy on Ulthuan to siphon away the winds of magic. Many were the arguments he had with Aenarion over this course of action; Aenarion feared rightly that the weapons and armour of the elven lords were forged by the same magic that sustained the daemons and without it the isle he ruled would be defenceless.

The two never came to agreement on the matter, and when Aenarion's wife, the Everqueen, was slain, he ignored Caledor's counsel and sought out the Sword of Khaine to strike down the daemon hosts. The Phoenix King became a dark, vengeful warrior, and founded the kingdom of Nagarythe in the north of Ulthuan, and ruled from the citadel of Anlec. The Dragontamer quit his alliance with Aenarion and his own kingdom, named after Caledor, turned its efforts to the creation of the magical vortex.

Though once friends, the two great elves never again wholly trusted each other, but at the moment of greatest peril,

Caledor and Aenarion both played their part in the defeat of the daemons. Caledor began his ultimate spell upon an isle in the waters of Ulthuan's Inner Sea. Seeing what the Dragontamer intended, the daemons threw their armies at Caledor and his mages. Aenarion came to Caledor's aid and held back the legions of Chaos to give the mages time to complete their incantations.

Both were to sacrifice themselves. Though victorious, Aenarion and his dragon, Indraguir, were grievously wounded in the battle. True to the oaths he had made, Aenarion flew north to the Blighted Isle to return the Sword of Khaine to its black altar; neither king nor dragon were seen again. Caledor and his followers became trapped within the eye of the vortex, frozen in time by the spell, doomed to an endless existence as conduits for the magical energy.

Thus the lands of Caledor and Aenarion were left without their rulers; Caledor in the mountains of the south, Nagarythe in the bleak north. The distrust that existed between the two kingdoms did not end with the deaths of their founders, but grew greater. The successors of the elven lords would not surrender power to each other and each claimed credit for the victory over the daemons.

When Aenarion's son, Malekith, desired to inherit his father's position as Phoenix King, the princes of Caledor resisted. They reminded the elves of the other realms that Malekith had been raised in a place of darkness and despair, and that the Dragontamer had prophesied that the descendants of Aenarion would be forever tainted by the curse of Bloody-Handed Khaine.

The First Council of princes chose Bel Shanaar of Tiranoc to be Phoenix King, thus ensuring neither Caledor nor Nagarythe would hold the greatest power in Ulthuan. Malekith accepted this decision with dignity and the Caledorians likewise endorsed the choice of Bel Shanaar.

Under the reign of this new Phoenix King the elves rebuilt their cities and explored the world. Colonies were founded across the oceans, and the influence of the elven kingdoms spread far and wide. Always wary of each other's status and power, Nagarythe and Caledor continued their rivalry for centuries and though peace existed between the two kingdoms, their distrust of each other deepened, the princes

of each accusing the other of being jealous, arrogant and self-serving.

So it was with some annoyance, and a little trepidation, that Prince Imrik of Caledor heard the news that Naggarothi banners had been seen approaching his camp. The general of Caledor's armies in Elthin Arvan, the lands east of the Great Ocean, Imrik was grandson to the Dragontamer, younger brother of the kingdom's ruling prince, Caledrian.

The arrival of the Naggarothi was untimely. Imrik and his warriors had spent twelve days pursuing a horde of savage orcs and goblins through the wild lands in the south of Elthin Arvan, and that day would bring their foes to battle.

'The Naggarothi seek to steal our glory,' Imrik said to his companions, his youngest brother Dorien and cousin Thyrinor.

The three sat in Imrik's pavilion, already in their armour of golden plates and silver scale. The herald who had brought the news of the Naggarothi arrival waited nervously for his general's command.

'They believe they can take a victory here and claim these lands for themselves,' said Dorien. 'Send them away with a warning that they trespass on Caledorian soil.'

Thyrinor shifted uncomfortably in his seat and raised a hand to Dorien to ask for his peace.

'It would not be wise to provoke them,' said Thyrinor. He turned to the messenger. 'How many do you say they are?'

'Twelve thousand, my prince,' replied the herald. 'Of which four thousand are knights. We counted them as they forded the Laithenn River.'

'They'll be here well before noon,' said Imrik. 'They marched all night.'

'We should ready our army and attack the orcs before the Naggarothi get here,' said Dorien, standing up. 'They cannot claim credit for a battle that was finished before they arrived.'

'Not yet,' said Imrik. 'I will not be forced into hasty battle.'

'So what would you have us do?' said Dorien. 'Share the glory with those cold-blooded killers?'

'We'll prove ourselves greater,' said Imrik. He signalled for the herald to approach. 'Ride out to the Naggarothi and tell their prince to come to me.'

The messenger bowed and departed swiftly, leaving the three lords of Caledor in silence. Imrik waited patiently, arms

crossed, while Dorien paced to and fro. Thyrinor moved to a table and poured himself wine mixed with water, which he sipped with an agitated expression. After some time, he turned on Dorien with a frown.

‘Sit down, cousin, please,’ Thyrinor said sharply. He swallowed a mouthful of wine. ‘You prowl like a Chracian lion in a pen.’

‘I don’t like it,’ said Dorien. ‘How did the Naggarothi learn of our pursuit, and how did they catch us so swiftly? And if my pacing vexes you so much, feel free to step outside, cousin. Or would that be too far away from the wine ewers for you?’

‘Stop bickering.’ Imrik’s quiet instruction stilled the pair. ‘Dorien, sit down. Thyrinor, drink no more. Our army readies for battle while you squabble like children. Wait.’

Dorien acquiesced and sat down, sweeping his long scarlet cloak over one arm of his chair. Thyrinor emptied his goblet and placed it on the table before returning to his seat.

‘How can you be so calm, cousin?’ said Thyrinor. ‘Do you expect the Naggarothi to be our allies?’

‘No,’ said Imrik, unmoving.

‘You give them opportunity to snub us,’ Thyrinor said. He threw up his hands. ‘Why attempt an embassy you know will not succeed, cousin?’

‘Because they would not,’ said Imrik. ‘We behave with dignity.’

‘As if the Naggarothi care about our dignity,’ Dorien said with a snort of derision. ‘They will see it as weakness.’

‘Do you see it as weakness, brother?’ asked Imrik. His eyes fixed Dorien with an intent stare.

‘No,’ Dorien replied, a little hesitant. ‘I know we are not weak.’

‘That is all that matters,’ said Imrik. ‘I care not for the opinions of the Naggarothi.’

Again the elves fell quiet. Outside, the clamour and bustle of the mustering army could be heard. Captains called out for their companies to assemble and piercing clarions signalled the call to battle.

Imrik passed the time in contemplation of the battle to come. The Naggarothi were an unwelcome distraction. He had not become Caledor’s most lauded general by allowing himself to be distracted. The prince knew his companions thought him

brusque, cold-hearted even; he considered them boisterous and hot-headed. The prince was content with his life. The chance to prove himself in battle, to show his worth as an heir of the Dragontamer, was enough. Even the small exchanges with his brother and cousin left him agitated, and glad to be far from the court of Caledrian. Here in the colonies an elf could make a name for himself with honest endeavour, away from the personalities and politics of Ulthuan.

It had been such constant wrangling that had driven him to Elthin Arvan. Though descended from the line of Caledor, Imrik had little aptitude or desire for magical ability and so had dedicated himself to mastery of the sword and the lance, and the command of armies. He shared his people's distrust of the Naggarothi, but also held them in some grudging respect; their accomplishments in war were unmatched by any other kingdom, including his own.

In particular, he admired their ruler, Prince Malekith. Imrik would never say as much to another elf, but the achievements of Malekith were an example to be followed. Such admiration was shadowed by irritation too; had Imrik not shared his lifetime with Malekith he would have been renowned as the greatest general of Ulthuan. As it was, he was famed in Caledor and amongst a few of the colonial cities that knew of his exploits, but his victories and conquests were otherwise drowned out by the accolades heaped upon the prince of Nagarythe.

Imrik curled his lip in a silent snarl, annoyed that despite his efforts, he had allowed the Naggarothi to interrupt his pre-battle preparations. Dorien and Thyrinor looked at their commander, alerted to his annoyance.

'Call the army to order,' Imrik said, standing up.

He lifted his sword from where it leaned against the side of his chair, and buckled its golden sheath to his belt; his ornate helm he tucked under his arm. The hem of his cloak brushing the intricately embroidered rugs on the floor, Imrik led the other two elves from the tent.

The air was damp and the sky overcast, a thin mist obscuring the heathlands on which the elves had made camp. The pennants atop the pavilions hung limply in the still air, wet from rainfall in the night. The small town of gaily coloured tents was alive with activity as retainers bustled to attend to

the needs of the captains and knights. Spear companies marched briskly to the mustering south-east of the encampment, their silver armour and dark green shields dappled with water droplets.

Imrik turned to the west and strode along a temporary causeway laid across the grass and heather. Gilded harnesses studded with rubies and emeralds jingled as a squadron of knights rode across the pathway ahead, dipping their lances in salute as they passed in front of their general, white steeds stepping briskly. Imrik raised his hand in acknowledgement.

Passing between an open-sided armoury and a store tent, the three princes reached the dragon field. Three of the mighty beasts lazed on the stretch of rocky grassland, expelling clouds of vapour from their nostrils. Two were the colour of embers, with deep red scales and orange underbellies; the third had an upper body of dark blue like twilight, its legs and lower parts the colour of slate. All three raised massive heads on their long necks at Imrik's call.

'Time for battle!' shouted the general.

The dragons heaved themselves up with growls and snorts, yellow eyes blinking slowly. The largest, one of the red-scaled pair, stretched out its wings and yawned wide, fumes smoking from its gullet.

'So soon?' the monster said, its voice a deep rumble.

'Are you tired, Maedrethnir?' said Thyrinor. 'Perhaps you wish you were slumbering beneath the mountains of Caledor with your kin?'

'Impudent elf,' said the dragon. 'Some of us must remain awake to keep you out of trouble.'

'Perhaps you would prefer to walk?' suggested Thyrinor's mount, the blue dragon called Anaegnir. She flapped her wings twice, buffeting the elves.

Young elves in the livery of Imrik's household emerged from the camp, bearing the ornate saddle-thrones and weapons of the dragon princes. When the harnesses were fitted – an involved operation that required much cooperation from the dragons – the three princes pulled themselves up by ropes to the backs of their mounts. They buckled belts across their waists, leaving their armoured legs to hang free across the necks of the beasts. Each was handed a lance by his retainer;

weapons forged of silvery ithilmar, three times as long as an elf is tall, garlanded with green and red pennants. The princes took up high shields and hung them from their saddles.

When the retainers had retreated a safe distance, Imrik leaned forwards along Maedrethnir's neck and rubbed a hand along his scales.

'South-east, to the army,' said the general.

Maedrethnir launched into the air, the grass flattened beneath the thunderous flapping of his wings. The other two dragons followed swiftly, and all three princes circled higher and higher above the camp.

The altitude granted Imrik an impressive view of his army assembling. Two thousand knights drew up in squadrons a hundred strong, their banners and pennants rippling as they trotted across the wild heath. To their left, the spear companies formed; blocks of five hundred warriors, nine in all, ranked ten deep behind their standards. Twenty wagons formed a column behind the spearmen, each drawn by four horses and bearing two bolt throwers and their crews. Archers, some three thousand more elves, waited in companies beside the spearmen.

In green and red and silver, the elven host stretched across the dark moorlands. Turning his gaze to the south-east, Imrik could make out the distant curve of a river, rushing down from the high mountains jutting above the horizon. From above it was easy to see the route taken by the orcs; a swathe of trampled grass and bushes that meandered towards the river. The smoke of hundreds of fires obscured the wide waters much farther to the south where the greenskins had made their camp.

As Maedrethnir tilted a wing and dipped towards the army, Imrik heard a distant shout. Looking over his shoulder, he saw Dorien waving his lance to attract attention. When he saw that Imrik was watching, he pointed the lance tip to the west. Imrik told Maedrethnir to turn to the right so he could see what had attracted Dorien's attention.

A column of black and purple wound alongside a narrow stream: the Naggarothi. Their armour glittered with gold, their knights in the vanguard setting a swift pace while the infantry followed as quickly as possible. Imrik spied something else, a shape above the army of Nagarythe.

‘What is that flying above the Naggarothi?’ he asked.

Maedrethnir turned his head to look, gliding effortlessly in a slow arc towards the other elven host.

‘A griffon and rider,’ said the dragon, with some distaste.

‘Shall we teach them not to intrude upon our skies?’

‘Take me to them,’ said Imrik.

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